

Preliminary Outcomes
Report
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Parents Plus Special Needs Programme

Suzanne McMahon, Liz Noonan, Catherine Smyth, and Charlotte Wilson

School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin

Last autumn over 50 practitioners were trained in the new Parents Plus Special Needs Programme, a programme for parents of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. We evaluated what changed for the parents and how they and the practitioners found it.

This is what we found.

Who took part?

Twenty three groups were run across the whole of Ireland; with 12 starting in Autumn 2019 and 11 starting in early 2020. Some of these groups were quite small with only 8 parents, but some were big with 21 parents. Overall, 277 parents took part. The average age of parents was 48 years old and the average adolescent age was 14 years old. 11% of the parents were fathers and 69% of the adolescents were male. The table below outlines the disabilities reported for the adolescents whose parents took part.



	% of 277 adolescents
Mild Intellectual Disability	40%
Moderate Intellectual Disability	47%
Severe/Profound Intellectual Disability	13%
Co-morbid Autism Spectrum Disorder	57%
Down Syndrome	26%
Other Co-morbid Diagnoses ^a	16%

^a Other Diagnoses include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Fragile X, Epilepsy, Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, Angelman syndrome, Cri-du-chat, Kabuki syndrome, Prader Willi syndrome.

What did we look at?

We asked parents to fill in some questionnaires about their adolescent and their behaviour, about their own parenting, and about their goals. We also asked the parents and the practitioners to fill in an end of programme feedback questionnaire. Finally, some of the parents and practitioners talked to us about taking part in the programme.

“The programme will change the future for children with special needs, their parents, their families, and their communities”
- Eleanor Kent, Social Worker

What did we find?

What changed for the parents and adolescents?

When we compared what things were like before the group to what things were like after the group we found improvements in parenting practices, parental satisfaction, and parental self-efficacy. We also found that parents reported reductions in problem behaviours amongst their adolescents. Parents reported that they moved significantly closer to achieving their goals also. There were no changes reported in adolescent prosocial skills or emotional problems.

What did parents say about the group?

In feedback in their own words the parents expressed what they found helpful about the programme. They found the group very powerful, with other parents being important in them feeling supported and learning new skills. However, they also found the access to good information vital. This information was both the course content and also the skills and experience of the facilitators. Parents also spoke about how important it was to have a focus on themselves as people in their own right, but also spoke about the things that changed for their adolescents. Over 95% of parents said that they thought the group was well organised, the facilitators included everyone, and that they led the group well.

What did practitioners say about the group?

Practitioners also benefitted from running a group. They felt that the programme had suitable flexibility to work well with a wide range of parents, and that the group content and format added to the support parents gained from taking part. They felt supported by Parents Plus to facilitate the programme and that the programme gave them a greater awareness of the struggles the families experience every day. The main difficulty that arose in the group was the lack of time, whether this was for preparing for the group, or having enough time to get through the content in each group session. However, practitioners were good at dealing with the practicalities and made it work.



What next?

There are a number of things that are happening next. We want to write these findings up to share with other researchers and clinicians across the world. The new programme will be officially launched in September 2020, and training in the new programme will be going ahead in October 2020. Parents Plus recently announced their grant partnership with Sunbeam Trust. The partnership will see Sunbeam Trust fund the training of professionals delivering services to families of adolescents and young adults with an intellectual disability from the Wicklow area in the Special Needs Programme.

For more information about the research contact

**Charlotte Wilson,
School of Psychology,
Trinity College Dublin
cewilson@tcd.ie**

For more information about the programme contact

**John Sharry,
Parents Plus,
Mater Hospital, Dublin, john@parentsplus.ie**